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THE RELATIONS OF THE UNITED  
STATES AND MEXICO SINCE 1910<sup>12</sup>

With the Compliments of the Author  
HERBERT INGRAM PRIESTLEY

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## THE RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICO SINCE 1910

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HERBERT INGRAM PRIESTLEY

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Mexican history of the last decade falls, with regard to the exercise of sovereignty, into four major divisions. On December 1, 1910, Porfirio Díaz was inaugurated president for the eighth successive time, after a period of long discussion and trial of various plans to provide a successor. The possibilities of José Yves Limantour, Ramón Corral, and General Bernardo Reyes were considered and rejected as unsatisfactory either to Díaz or to his constituency. Díaz had failed, like many another autocrat, to raise up a successor; while his own powers grew less from weight of years and from the cumulative effects of his bestowal of special privileges upon his coterie of governing assistants, he lived to see the long impending deluge come upon his native land.

Díaz made fruitless efforts, first to ignore, next to prevent, the campaign waged against him by Francisco I. Madero, but was finally obliged, by the latter's success in arms, to resign his presidency on May 25, 1911, and leave Mexico. The second period, that of the Madero ascendancy, continued nominally at least for nearly two years from the resignation of Díaz, through the four-month provisional presidency of Francisco de la Barra to the Ten Tragic Days, February 9 to 18, 1913. The third period was that

of the tenure of power by Victoriano Huerta, until July 15, 1914. Since that time, and it is for a longer period than any president except Díaz, the executive power has been controlled by Venustiano Carranza.

In a general way, American relations with Mexico have followed much the same chronological divisions. The whole period has as its absorbing feature our sincere, though often dubiously managed, effort to assist Mexico to obtain a stable, honorable, and effective government, first to the end that American lives and property may be secure south of the Río Grande, and second, that our neighbor may for her own sake become peaceable and prosperous, so that we may mutually enjoy the reasonable intercourse which should be the portion of civilized nations.

During the entire period, then, there has been but the one question of policy on the part of the American people and government. Numerous incidents have, however, served to punctuate that policy in ways which have prevented the desired success. The most significant episode of the period, so far as diplomatic tradition goes, entraining as it does events of deepest import in our relations with Mexico, was the refusal to accord recognition to General Huerta and the persistent and successful effort to procure his downfall. Upon the grounds of morality this refusal was eminently justifiable. Huerta's coup was effected by a small part of the armed forces, which did not represent the majority opinion in the Republic; his betrayal of Madero was treacherous in the extreme; his hands were stained with the blood of useless victims of street fighting; he was certain to benefit by, if he was not cognizant of, the proposed murder of Madero and Pino Suárez; there was little ground upon which to commend the professed patriotism of his followers, or to suggest that President Wilson was not within the bounds of propriety in preventing the success of his "Revolution."

But the consequences of the announced policy of non-recognition of the right of revolution, of rejecting the

obvious success of an armed movement powerful enough to take and hold the capital, are far-reaching. Since that step, our relations have been largely bound up with that policy. Important, first, however, it is to examine the general bases of belief and opinion, or of hope and desire, for our Mexican relations which have been cherished by the American people for many years, as expressed in idealistic phrases by President Wilson in his numerous public utterances to Mexico and other Hispanic American republics.

We may indulge in a backward glance for the sake of this examination. While President Díaz was approaching his last days of power, a large part of the American people, many of them investors whom Díaz had attracted, others simple humanitarians, felt a keen solicitude concerning the prospects of internal peace when Don Porfirio's power should be gone. With this uncertainty prevailing, the tragic error of the Creelman interview was committed by Díaz. He then gave out a statement which he assuredly knew to be erroneous, but which he must have considered a justifiable item for American publicity. This was that Mexico was then ready for democratic government. He also declared that he would permit the candidacy in the coming presidential elections of nominees not directly sponsored by his government. Numerous Mexicans, as well as Americans, were so unfortunate as to take this declaration for a signal that political parties and campaigns might freely exist in Mexico. Not long afterward the campaign of Madero, ripening into real revolt, was considered in the United States as the expression of a long pent-up agony of political degradation of the upper classes and the economic and social degradation of the lower classes throughout the Díaz régime. To an extent this estimate was true, but hardly true enough to warrant the popular support among us of the Revolution, or the enthusiasm with which we greeted its success. American opinion, which reached its least restrained expression in Roosevelt's dictum that Díaz

was the greatest man of his age, fell rapidly away to Madero, under the belief that a wiser, more constructive statesman, and not a despot, was about to inaugurate a period of respect for human rights reared upon the assured material foundations of prosperity which Díaz had planted. So strong was our approbation that there are not lacking those in Mexico who will aver that the Madero Revolution was supported secretly by the American government. No doubt exists among ourselves as to our government's neutrality, but the Mexicans were convinced that our interest was intrusive, and that it was affected by the Díaz policy of playing off British against American oil interests to prevent our influence from becoming preponderant, or by the nationalization of the railroads as a check upon our strength in Mexico.

Madero's influence was short-lived because of his weak attempt to conciliate old political enemies, his refusal to reward the aid of the Gómez faction, his brother's rifling of the treasury to reimburse family investments in the campaign, and his inability to fulfill the millennial promises he had made. Americans were disappointed to see that, in spite of revolutionary enthusiasm, disorders continued, the cabinet began to break up, the State of Oaxaca refused to recognize the government; Orozco, military governor of Chihuahua, turned against it, and there was frequent loss of American life in the turmoil. Madero, informed by President Taft that Americans engaged in belligerent acts must not be executed when taken, replied refusing to admit our right to proffer the admonition. Conditions during the summer of 1912 were extremely bad. American refugees, warned to leave Mexico, were brought out in great numbers, Congress appropriating \$100,000 for their aid. Successes of rebels in northern Mexico deprived Madero of Chihuahua, Durango, and Sinaloa.

In October, Felix Díaz revolted in Vera Cruz, but was promptly captured and imprisoned. Released by sympathizers, he and Bernardo Reyes began the street fighting



from the Ciudadela in Mexico City known as the Ten Tragic Days, in which Reyes was killed. Huerta went over to the reactionaries. Madero and Vice-president Pino Suárez were imprisoned and forced to resign, Huerta becoming legal holder of the executive power. Madero and Suárez were killed under the "*ley fuga*" after having been promised that their resignations would not be acted upon until they had gone aboard a vessel at Vera Cruz.

Now it was that the erroneous idea of Mexico created by the Creelman interview and the Madero Revolution had its unhappy effect. President Wilson, believing that a real election could be held, refused to recognize Huerta and soon began to urge an election. Thus was marked a new phase in our relations with Mexico. It began a period of direct intervention. Our ambassador, Henry Lane Wilson, who had congratulated Huerta upon his accession to the presidency, was recalled and subsequently dismissed. Our government was imitated in denying recognition by the powers of Argentine, Brazil, and Chile. European powers which had at first recognized Huerta soon acceded to President Wilson's view, but later extended recognition, as did several American powers. Our own attitude was the decisive factor in the end.

Huerta, so-called "man of iron," was not in complete control of the country. The Revolutionists were led against him by Venustiano Carranza, old senator under Díaz and supporter of Madero. Huerta was unable to pacify the country or protect foreigners. President Wilson sent John Lind to Mexico as his personal representative to voice a request that Huerta should call an early election during an armistice; all factions were to participate and acquiesce in the election, Huerta not standing for choice. Huerta believed that Lind did not represent American opinion, and declined his request. Lind was unsuccessful because Wilson withheld recognition and because the American request was physically impossible; the situation was not helped by the attempt to argue against the legality of



Huerta's assumption of office, for, as nearly always, the Mexicans had been particularly careful to forefend just such criticism.

Harassed by the urging of foreign ministers to yield, opposed by Congress, unable to make loans, or to make peace with the rebels, unwilling to salute the United States flag in reparation for insult to it at Tampico, and without power to cope with our seizure of Vera Cruz on April 21, 1914, Huerta severed diplomatic relations and the representatives of the two nations received their passports on April 22 and 23.

The tensivity of the situation was soon relieved by the proffer of their good offices for mediation by Argentine, Brazil, and Chile. The United States and Huerta accepted, Carranza also doing so "in principle," but declining to take part in the negotiations. His emissaries joined the Niagara Falls Conference in June, however. There the effort was to choose a provisional president acceptable to all parties. This plan failed, but it was demonstrated that Huerta had no prospect of recognition. After attempting to hold an election he resigned on July 15 in favor of Carbajal, who was to resign in favor of a Constitutionalist, this party now being in control of much of the Republic. He ruled less than a month, resigning and leaving the city, it is said, upon receipt of a telegram from the American government requesting him to hand the government to the Constitutionlists. On August 21 Carranza entered Mexico City. The policy of "watchful waiting" announced by Wilson on December 2, 1913, now punctuated by aid to the Carranzistas in arms and munitions, by preventing the Huertistas from obtaining the same aid, and by hindering their attack upon Tampico, had brought to the capital the man deemed by many persons the most hopeful prospect for the pacification of the country.

But the ranks of the victors had already split. Carranza became a candidate for the presidency; Villa declared war on him and drove him out of the capital on November 20.

Carranza moved on Vera Cruz, entering as the Americans, delayed in their evacuation, moved out on November 23. Villa held Mexico City unopposed from December 1 for nearly two months, but was in turn obliged to evacuate, being followed by the Zapatistas from Morelos in March, 1915. This group held the city until July 10.

During the spring and summer the status of foreigners was most unhappy. Spaniards suffered especially, many of them, including their minister, being expelled. In March President Wilson secured permission from the various Mexican leaders to remove foreigners from the capital under our protection. His notes of remonstrance to Carranza at treatment of foreigners were met by acceptance, though ungracious, of responsibility for their safety.

During 1914 Villa had been much in the limelight. He set up a "government" in northern Mexico, and seemed for a time to be the man who could restore peace. Emis-saries were sent to him by Wilson, but his star never rose higher. In April, 1915, Obregón defeated him at Celaya, and later near León. President Wilson then indicated a more vigorous policy by urging the leaders to drop their quarrels or the United States "must use means to help Mexico save herself and help her people." In August the A B C powers, and Bolivia, Guatemala, and Uruguay, urged the Mexicans to erect a provisional government and call a general election. Carranza protested against this "new policy of interference." Our State Department issued an appeal from the six powers named above and ourselves calling for a conference and offering help. Carranza again rejected interference, being then successful against Villa, who by the same token accepted. In September a conference of the powers just mentioned agreed to recognize the faction which after three weeks should show greatest success in maintaining order. This led to the recognition of Carranza as *de facto* president on October 19 by nine American powers. This was a victory which the Constitutionalistas had not won by decisive military success; the

step was a precedent-breaking one for us, and justifiable, if at all, because of the desperate need of peace and the hope that it would prove efficacious.

Recognition elicited from Carranza renewed acceptance of responsibility for foreign lives and property. Formal diplomatic relations were resumed in December by the appointment of Henry P. Fletcher as ambassador and the reception of Eliseo Arredondo as representative of the new Mexican Government. Fletcher did not go to Mexico until some time later; his residence there has been short and intermittent, perhaps as a remonstrance against attitudes of the Mexican government.

But the piqued Villistas were still to be reckoned with. On January 10, 1916, eighteen Americans were shot down by them at Santa Ysabel while going into Mexico to reopen mines at the solicitation of the Carranza government. The United States Congress passed resolutions in both houses demanding armed intervention. Carranza promised to punish the perpetrators of the atrocity; later two Villa leaders, one said to be responsible, were executed.

In March Villa raided Columbus, killing several Americans. Our troops pursued him on a "hot trail," the pursuit soon becoming a punitive expedition under General Pershing. It lacked elements of preparation and execution which made it a failure. It aroused fierce resentment in Mexico, being condemned by both Americans and Mexicans for diametrically opposite reasons. Carranza had given reluctant and qualified consent to the expedition, but soon began to object to it, asking how far our troops intended to penetrate and how long they would remain. We were using 12,000 men in Mexico and 18,000 on the border, the latter group soon being largely increased. General Obregón, minister of war, conferred with Generals Scott and Funston at El Paso, urging our withdrawal. Carranza troops failed to aid in the attempt to take Villa. Our State Department on May 10 called upon Americans in Mexico to leave the country. On the twenty-second Carranza pro-

tested sharply against the "invasion and violation of sovereignty." The attempt to take Villa was now ostensibly given up, as he had been wounded and reported dead; our forces remained only as security against disorders, and Carranza was so informed. On June 21 a troop of our soldiers, moving, against the expressed desire of Mexico, "in a direction other than northward," was attacked at Carrizal. A number were killed and about a score were made prisoners; the latter were released upon the sharp demand of our government. In July the American forces were moving northward, and Carranza expressed readiness to discuss measures to remedy the situation, suggesting acceptance of Hispanic American offers of mediation. Upon Secretary Lansing's acceptance a commission met in September and sat until January 15, 1917, but failed to discover any satisfactory principle of action because Carranza would not concede our right to send troops in pursuit of raiders. Since that time our troops have frequently crossed the line on hot trails, the Mexican government protesting in *pro forma* fashion but offering no active resistance. On February 5 the withdrawal of the expedition was completed. It had been in Mexico nearly eleven months, had engaged over 100,000 militia on the border in addition to the invading troops, and had cost about \$130,000,000. The effect was to add to the anger of the Mexicans and insure Villa a place among the immortals of banditry. I recently heard him called in northern Mexico "more of a patriot than Carranza." Americans in Mexico were placed in serious jeopardy; our niceties about using the northern railroads to move our troops made our success highly dubious, whereas vigorous use of them would probably have brought success. Thus there was a net result of general dissatisfaction. It was the most extreme feature of our intervention policy thus far; it attests the amount of strain our relations may bear without declaration of war.

Border troubles have continued since that time without variation calculated to change the problem, though once

our troops actively intervened to support the government. Frequent waves of irritation occur and may be expected. The border patrols are large and costly; our own action has been limited in all cases to our interpretation of the right of self-defense.

Since 1917 the chief difficulty has been due to provisions of the new Mexican Constitution concerning petroleum. During the great war the problem of Mexico's neutrality was more a matter of attitude than of interchange of correspondence; there was for a time an undoubted sympathy with Germany in hope of relief from the shadow of the United States in Mexican affairs, but this feeling grows less with time since the failure of the German cause.

The Constitutionalist party fought its battles to vindicate the Constitution of 1857, itself a very liberal document. But the Constitutional Convention which met in Querétaro in December, 1916, the members of which were chosen by the Carranza faction only, enacted an entirely new Constitution save in such sections, retained or amplified, as suited its program. A radical element inserted, it is said, through influence of Socialistic advisers from American territory, certain features with which the President is not in full sympathy. The Constitution is of interest from the viewpoint of international relations for two reasons. One involves the legality of its enactment, and the other the validity of its provisions regarding contractual rights in property. The old constitution provided a *modus operandi* for its amendment by Congress, and specified that if it should be violated or set aside by revolution the responsible persons were to be tried under charges of treason. Hence the flaw in the legal filiation of the new document can be covered only by the definitive success of its sponsors. This point is complicated with the second, for the scattered but numerous opponents of the present government announce the Constitution of 1857 "with suitable [but as yet undefined] amendments" as the aegis under which they hope to overthrow Carranza; furthermore, the underlying cause of irritation between the



two countries is the advanced position taken in Article 27 of the new Constitution on the ownership of subsoil products. This article and the decrees intended to enforce it reinvest the nation with ownership of many of these products, including petroleum, as they were held in colonial times, as the prescriptive possession of the nation. These decrees are considered by those having oil interests, European and American, to be confiscatory. Especially menacing are the retroactive and coercive provisions of the legislation. They have not, however, been put into effect on account of the attitude of the oil producers, backed by their respective governments. The United States has informed the Mexican government that it will not brook action confiscatory of the property rights of its citizens. With the future program as it affects unbought oil deposits, there is not visible ground for international complication.

The Mexican attitude as to the legal status of subsoil products is that the legislation of the Díaz régime, which made it possible for purchasers of the land surface to acquire title to the subsoil products was "unconstitutional," that is, it reversed the basic law of subsoil property. It was expected that the Mexican Congress at its sessions last summer would enact legislation to remedy the retroactive features of the proposed system, which runs counter to the contractual rights under which foreigners hold their oil lands. It failed to do so; on the contrary, legislation confirming the oil program has been proposed but not passed. The president's power has recently been limited by Congress, which withdrew the plenary war powers he had hitherto exercised. This is part of the political contest for the presidency which is to culminate in next summer's election. Congress is more radical and less inclined to reasoned action on foreign interests than is the President.

The oil interests feel distrust of Congressional legislation to readjust their claims, believing that it can be too easily reversed by succeeding sessions. Some pronounced constitutional change will be required to satisfy the situation,

though it may be doubted whether even this guarantee would be considered other than temporary. Land and mining legislation in Mexico has always been peculiarly susceptible to the shiftings of the political wind. Recent decrees of President Carranza have made it possible to continue oil development without prejudice to the basic claims of either the Mexican government or the oil producers.

Within recent months the question has been raised before committees of our own Congress as to whether or not, in view of the oil situation, continuing disorder and frequent loss of American lives without prompt punishment of murderers, it would be advisable to withdraw recognition from President Carranza. Ambassador Fletcher has pointed out the disastrous effect of such a course of action. We are, then, in the difficult position of countenancing a government for the existence of which we are largely responsible but which has not yet accomplished as much as it ought in pacifying and stabilizing the country, or else of accepting the more disagreeable and costly alternative of interfering with the hope of bringing about more satisfactory conditions.

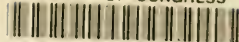
We have hovered near the verge of the latter choice many times during the past nine years. Many Americans have vehemently advocated it; many more consider it inevitable. General public opinion is reluctant to assume so grave a responsibility. The most recent estimates of the time and force needed to effect establishment of order in Mexico through American intervention speak of an army of 450,000 men operating three years. Such an estimate does much to exculpate the Mexican government for having failed to bring quiet in nine years with about one-eighth as many men and infinitely poorer equipment than ours.

But it would be only after complete pacification that the real task of helping Mexico could begin. Pacification and stabilization are the prerequisites to the program, but not the program. Some of the labors of Hercules that would follow in the train of armed intervention would lead us to



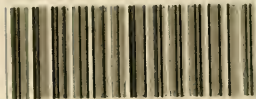
revision and reorganization of the entire system of land ownership; we should have a struggle to see that this was done without more benefit to Americans than to Mexicans. We should need to apply heroic curative measures to the judicial system; we should find it difficult to modify a Roman system to fit our ideals of procedure in securing equal justice for all men. We should have to develop an effective industrial and agricultural program for a submerged and desolated native Indian population; it would require enormous expenditure of labor, and will, and years, to make this program effective. We should need to democratize education, and educate democracy at the same time; this, after unseating an incipient democracy, imperfect and unsatisfactory though it be, would be to place ourselves in an equivocal position unless we previously should announce a specific date for withdrawal of our intervention. We should assume such dubious and Herculean tasks in the face of the hatred and suspicion of most of the Hispanic American countries unless we should be wise and consistent enough to work out a plan of coöperation with South American powers; any conceivable plan would be most difficult, if not impracticable, and in any event the heritage of hatred would be very enduring. And we should be under moral obligations not to compensate ourselves for our expenditure of life and energy by taking territory, unless we chose to act counter to our oft repeated public declarations.

The weight of these considerations may well give us pause in coming to a decision as to our proper course. There have been many provocations, but there are many historic obligations on either side which ought to outweigh momentary irritations. Situations due to political campaigns may produce important changes at any moment; they have, more than once, presaged the possible overthrow of the actual Mexican government and the opening of another season of civil war. In such a situation the problem of protecting our citizens in Mexico is likely to become extremely difficult and urgent. No other consideration could war-



rant precipitate action. Questions of law and property ought to be amenable to treatment by diplomacy, by international committees, or by arbitration if these fail. We should beware of invoking a too hasty national pride. The demand is for the demonstration of the same American loyalty to an ideal that sent our two millions over seas. The problem is not less perplexing than the recent European situation, even if less dangerous; it is, on the contrary, calculated to tax our capacity for constructive statesmanship to the utmost. An occasion of real or apparent denial of justice to our citizens or our investors in Mexico must not anger us into taking action wherein there is possibility that technical legality reinforces the position of the other side. We must not lay ourselves liable to reproach for assuming a new and heavy burden, the solution of which may be the means of enriching ourselves. It is a high and worthy ideal to look forward to a pacified, happy, and prosperous nation with whom, though it be largely of aboriginal stock, we may hope to enjoy on our southern border the same mutually satisfactory relations as those which have prevailed for so many years on the northern one. Tradition, ethnological problems, necessity of self-defense, may make this ideal impossible of realization. The ever present danger is that an untoward situation, such as that which recently engaged the attention of the public press of both countries, may impel us to a course of action in which we shall defeat ourselves. Like the poor, the problem of Mexico we have ever with us.

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